

# SEXUAL ASSAULT IN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

Sexual assault in marriage is an extremely prevalent form of sexual violence, particularly when we consider that women who are involved in physically abusive relationships may be especially vulnerable to sexual assaults by their intimate partners. The effects of sexual assault in intimate relationships are traumatic and severe. It remains a “hidden crime” with many survivors not identifying forced or coerced sex as sexual assault. In 1993, marital rape became a crime in all 50 states, in at least one section of the sexual offense codes. (Bergen, R. *Marital Rape*. VAWnet. [www.vawnet.org](http://www.vawnet.org). 1999.)

## Many women are sexually assaulted by their husbands or boyfriends.

- In the National Violence Against Women Survey, 7.7% of U.S. women reported that they had been raped by an intimate partner in their lifetime. (*Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence*. U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice. July 2000.)
- Violence against women is primarily partner violence: 76% of the women who were raped and/or physically assaulted since age 18 were assaulted by a current or former husband, cohabitating partner, or date. (*Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women*. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. November 1998.)

## Women who have been battered by an intimate partner reported being sexually assaulted as part of the abuse.

- In one study, 45.9% of the battered women who reported abuse also reported being forced into sex by their intimate partners. (Campbell, J. and Soeken, K. (1999). Forced Sex and Intimate Partner Violence: Effects on Women’s Risk and Women’s Health. *Violence Against Women*, 5, 1017-1035.)

## Survivors of intimate partner sexual assault often experience multiple sexual assaults.

- In one study, over half of marital rape survivors surveyed experienced more than one sexual assault in a 6-month reference period before the survey. (Mahoney, P. (1999). High Rape Chronicity and Low Rates of Help-Seeking Among Wife Rape Survivors in a Nonclinical Sample. *Violence Against Women*, 5, 993-1016.)
- Approximately half (51.2%) of the women raped by an intimate partner said they were victimized multiple times by that same partner. Overall, female rape victims averaged 4.5 rapes by the same partner. (*Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence*. U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice. July 2000.)

## Victims of intimate partner sexual assault are more likely to be injured or seriously assaulted.

- Compared to other sexual assault victims, marital rape victims are more likely to be injured or seriously assaulted, but less likely to seek medical help. (Mahoney, P. High Rape Chronicity and Low Rates of Help-Seeking among Wife Rape Survivors in a Non-clinical Sample. *Violence Against Women*, 5, 993-1016. 1999.)
- According to the U.S. Department of Justice, women who were raped since age 18 were nearly twice as likely as their male counterparts to report an injury other than the rape itself. (*Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women*. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. November 1998.)

## Women who are raped by intimate partners experience the same reactions as other rape survivors.

- Research indicates that women who are raped by their husbands are just as likely to experience a variety of psychological reactions as women who are raped by strangers or acquaintances. (Monson, C., Byrd, G. & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, J. To Have and to Hold: Perceptions of Marital Rape. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 11, 410-424. 1996.)

## Sexual assault occurs in same-sex intimate relationships.

- In a study of 162 gay men and 111 lesbians, 52% reported at least one incident of sexual coercion by same-sex partners. Lesbians experienced 1.2 incidents per person while gay men experienced 1.6 incidents per person. (Waldner-Haugrud, Lisa and Vaden Gratch, Linda. “Sexual Coercion in Gay/Lesbian Relationships: Descriptives and Gender Differences.” *Violence and Victims*. 12(1), 1997.)
- Although sexual assault is perhaps the most understudied topic of same-sex violence, clinical work and advocacy efforts show that lesbians and gay men endure the same types of abuse that heterosexual women suffer, including sexual assault. (Elliott, P. Shattering Illusions: Same-Sex Domestic Violence. In C. Renzetti & C. Miley (Eds.) *Violence in Gay and Lesbian Domestic Partnerships*. New York: The Haworth Press, Inc. 1996.)

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